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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000457

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/C
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CD](#) [SU](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: FIFTH SUDAN-CHAD CONTACT GROUP MEETING: EDGING
FORWARD

REF: A. NDJAMENA 413

[1](#)B. ASMARA 454

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: At the September 12 ministerial-level portion of the fifth Sudan-Chad Contact Group (CG) meeting, the foreign ministers of Sudan and Chad had agreed to re-open their respective embassies and exchange ambassadors. However, Chad's commitment to this course of action seemed weak. The two governments and the other CG participants also agreed to finance a \$30 million command center to oversee the observer force. The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) hosted the three-day talks, September 10-12, and used the occasion to bolster its reputation as a regional leader. Despite initial confusion over the participation of observers, post successfully attended all the meetings. End Summary.

OFF TO A SLOW START

[1](#)2. (C) Although the MFA had sent formal invitations and registration forms to us and other Western embassies, and had assured the DCM we were welcome because "no progress would be made without the presence of the big powers," the message did not trickle down to low-level MFA officials by opening day. MFA protocol coordinators initially denied the existence of the meetings, and then refused entry to the observers. Within a few hours however, coordination among the MFA elements had improved and protocol admitted the observers (United States, United Kingdom, UN, EU, and France) into the meetings.

CHAD RELUCTANT, SUDAN BOISTERIOUS

[1](#)3. (C) The majoiy of Friday's QmQnisterial meeting focused on finalizing arrangements for the exchange of ambassadors between Chad and Sudan. Sudanese Foreign Minister Deng Alor emphasized Sudan's readiness to proceed with the reinstatement, saying several times "we informed our ambassador to be ready to return at any moment." Chadian Foreign Minister Moussa Mahamat, however, expressed deep concern over re-opening embassies too soon, stating that "there are many other issues to discuss first." He additionally voiced concerns over Sudan's arming and

supporting of Chadian rebel groups. Deng Alor and other delegates downplayed these concerns as off-topic. Libyan Foreign Minister Abdurahaman Shalgam and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) representative both heavily pressured Chad to re-instate its ambassador to Sudan by threatening to boycott any following Contact Group meetings. The sixth CG meeting, scheduled to take place in Ndjamena, is also contingent upon the successful exchange of ambassadors, a task the CG assigned Libya and Gabon to oversee. Doubt lingers, however, about Chad's commitment to following through on the exchange of ambassadors.

¶4. (SBU) The Wednesday/Thursday expert-level meetings produced a proposal for a \$30 million command center to oversee the observer force. Each participating country (Chad, Sudan, Libya, Eritrea, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Gabon) agreed to finance the center with a contribution of \$4 million each; Libya agreed to provide the remaining \$2 million (ref A).

ERITREA'S AGENDA

¶5. (C) Eritrea has hosted a spate of regional conferences in recent months, presumably with the intent of staking its claim as a regional leader. The Eritrean Foreign Minister made sure to include in the communique a line about the participants acknowledging Eritrea's "efforts in the promotion of peace and security in the region." No participant, however, actually uttered such sentiments during the meeting.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Despite the pomp and circumstance surrounding

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the CG Meeting, the delegates accomplished few concrete results. Although Libya and other delegations placed heavy pressure on Chad to agree to the exchange of ambassadors, Chad never committed unequivocally. Indeed, the tone Chad set during the meeting indicated it is in no rush to re-instate its ambassador or re-open the embassy. However, the fact that the 6th meeting depends on this exchange may in the end force Chad's hand.

MCMULLEN